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SUBJECT: U.S. NAVY MAKES A BIG SPLASH IN CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE

**¶11. (U)** Summary. The U.S. Navy has been active in Congo-Brazzaville, and the small country is still feeling the benefits of its community outreach programs. A detachment of Seabees renovated two schools in the Brazzaville area, and on the heels of their departure, the USS FORREST SHERMAN made a port call on Pointe Noire, the commercial center on the Gulf of Guinea. Both events have generated positive media for the U.S. and beneficial outcomes for Congolese. End summary.

**¶12. (U)** A detachment of Seabees from the Naval Air Station in Sigonella, Sicily, landed in Brazzaville on August 15, and after taking a quick survey of work to be done, began an intensive renovation of two schools, a high school that was built in the 1970s and today has over 1700 students in nine classrooms, and an elementary school that serves over 3400 students in eight classrooms. By concentrating on the high school and contracting with the International Programs for Humanitarian Development (IPHD), a U.S.-based NGO working in the Congo, for the elementary school, the Seabees dedicated \$100,000 to the refurbishment of the two schools.

**¶13. (U)** This project was the first instance in U.S.-Congolese relations that U.S. military worked side-by-side with members of the Congolese Armed Forces, who had agreed to secure the site and do remedial clean-up. Within a few days however, the Congolese military were working with the Seabees, painting walls and repairing windows. Parents were called in during the later stages of the refurbishments to clean the area and create a committee to guarantee the upkeep of the grounds. In her remarks at the October 2 ceremony acknowledging the work of the Seabees, Minister of Education Rosalie Kama called on the parents to maintain the clean grounds and take a new pride in the renovated school. Rear Admiral Michael Groothousen attended the ceremony, representing the U.S. Naval Fleet, Sixth Command, Naples, the highest ranking naval officer ever to visit RoC. Another element of the public-private partnership has been the enthusiastic participation by U.S. companies (Chevron, Century Aluminum and Murphy Oil), who donated sufficient funds to outfit one of the Brazzaville schools with desks for all students (up to now, they had sat on the floor in all classrooms).

**¶14. (U)** The overwhelming success of the Seabees work did not go unnoticed. Letters of congratulations from Naples Sixth Fleet Command led to the decision to have the USS FORREST SHERMAN make a port call October 20-25. The Commander Naval Force Europe (CNE) Band arrived October 18 and performed two public concerts for the citizens of Pointe Noire. The CNE Band gave a public performance which was attended by several hundred Congolese including a number of local musicians who joined the band during its performance. Local media continuously featured footage of band interviews and concerts. An on-board reception attracted elite Congolese military and GRoC officials.

**¶15. (U)** Personnel of the USS FORREST SHERMAN worked on a community relation project painting an elementary school in the

suburbs of Pointe Noire. Each day for three days, 15-20 sailors worked with members of the IPHD team and local Congolese military to refurbish the school that serves 600 students from low-income families. At a school ceremony on October 24, Ambassador Weisberg noted that the collaboration with members of the Congolese Armed Forces on this project was a carry-over from the Brazzaville efforts in September. Children were given a tour of the ship following the ceremony.

¶ 6. (U) Congolese port, maritime, military and government officials were given training and informative tours of the USS FORREST SHERMAN. A total of 80 active maritime Congolese were given small boat operations, basic navigation, and diesel mechanic hands-on training. Mil-to-mil talks regarding the Automatic Identification System (AIS) capabilities renewed the RoC interest in obtaining the systems for the Gulf of Guinea.

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Comment  
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¶ 7. (U) Intensive media coverage has been focused on the U.S. as a result of these two activities for the past two months. One unexpected benefit of the visit of the USS FORREST SHERMAN is the increased interest on the part of the Congolese military and maritime personnel on Gulf of Guinea and transport security issues as well as the Congolese military requests for additional training opportunities. The positive results of the Seabee school renovations are an important feather in our cap as the U.S. competes on a daily basis with construction projects financed by donor nations. Whereas other nations concentrate on large construction projects that do not directly benefit the Congolese (such as the recent announcement by Libya that they will build a hospital but they will not provide any medical equipment or amenities to the building, such as air

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conditioning), these U.S.-sponsored programs directly benefit members of Congolese lower-income families in their daily lives.  
WEISBERG